

VOICES FOR VIRGINIA'S CHILDREN

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Recession Pushing Many Virginia Kids Into Poverty

2008 Child Poverty Rate Highest In Decade – 13,000 More Kids In Poverty

Leading Child Advocacy Organization Says Recession Impact Falling Disproportionately on Kids; Numbers To Worsen Over Next Two Years

Richmond: Figures released by the U.S. Census Bureau yesterday show a substantial increase last year in child poverty in Virginia, according to a statewide policy and advocacy organization that tracks child poverty data. **Voices for Virginia's Children** reports that the child poverty rate increased from 13 to 13.8 per cent in 2008, resulting in an additional 13,000 Virginia children living below the poverty line.

“These numbers, as bad as they are, are just the front edge of a rising tide that will likely carry significantly more children into poverty over the next two years, as the effects of the recession and the still-increasing unemployment rate add up,” indicates Voices’ director John Morgan. The 2008 poverty numbers, the latest one-year estimates available from the Census Bureau’s American Community Survey, show only the earliest effects of the recession, which began in late 2007.

The child poverty rate in Virginia is now at its highest point this decade after reaching a low of 11.3 per cent in 2003. “Clearly kids are bearing a huge and disproportionate share of the burden of recession-induced poverty,” according to Morgan. Virginia’s overall poverty rate increased from 9.9 to 10.2 per cent last year, so the child poverty rate is substantially higher (13.8) and growing faster (from 13 to 13.8 in one year) than the overall rate. “More than half of the newly-poor are children,” indicates Frank Beylotte, director of the Kids Count program at Voices, “while in recent years less than one-third of the poor have been children. The numbers show that this recession is especially harmful to our youngest citizens.”

Child poverty in Virginia, though worsening, is still relatively low compared to elsewhere, a reflection of the Commonwealth’s relatively strong economy. Virginia’s 13.8 per cent

rate is better than the U.S. average of 18.2 per cent. Yet that average rose only .2 per cent in the last year compared to the .8 per cent rise in Virginia, indicating that Virginia's relative advantage is shrinking somewhat and as poverty accelerates here more rapidly than in many other states.

The latest Virginia data also reveal a disturbing sub-trend – the apparent widening gap between poverty rates for white and black children. Poverty in 2008 grew from 8.6 to 8.8 per cent among white children, but from 26.4 to 29.6 per cent among black children, increasing the already-troubling gap between the two populations. The child poverty rate for the Hispanic population actually improved in 2008 after worsening substantially the previous year, yet at 16.1 per cent remained nearly double the rate for white children. “On the whole”, according to Voices’ Morgan, “the recession’s harmful effects are hitting children hard, and hitting black children – the population already most vulnerable to poverty – especially hard.”

Voices for Virginia’s Children will highlight the latest data for lawmakers and officials still dealing with the revenue crisis in state and local government spawned by the recession. “Here’s the really big takeaway message from the child poverty data, says Morgan. “Don’t make things worse for kids by cutting safety net services to balance budgets. When times are tough, policy makers have to hang tough to protect our kids. In fact, even in tough times, we should try to invest more in helping kids reach their full potential.”

Voices for Virginia’s Children is a non-partisan, privately funded policy research and advocacy organization that champions public policies to improve the well-being of Virginia’s children. Voices also sponsors Virginia KIDS COUNT, an Annie E. Casey Foundation initiative that tracks numerous indicators of child well-being over time and supports data-based policy solutions to benefit vulnerable children and families.